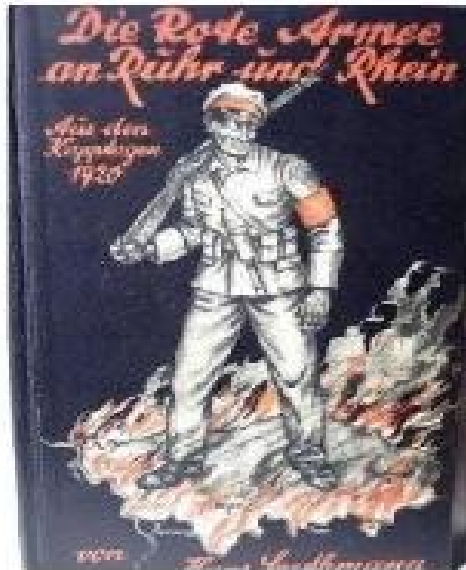


Anton Pannekoek and the theory of the transition - Radical Chains

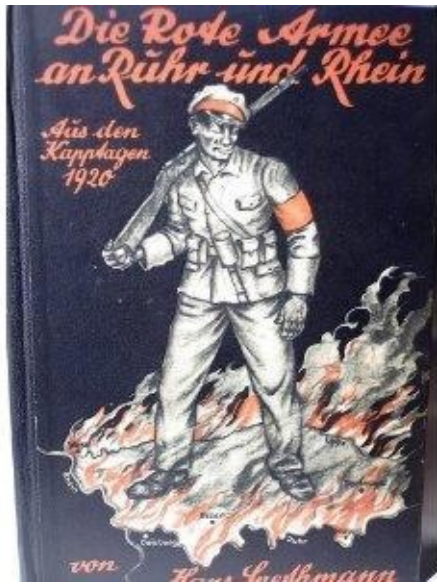


Pannekoek's experience of the German revolution led him to observe that the workers' own struggle needed continuously to break down regimes and forms resulting from previous struggles. This gave him a powerful analysis of opportunism and enabled him to perceive the dangers of mere representation of the working class.

Pantheon building is poor historical materialism and leads to an impoverished history and yet it has been the essence of the bolshevik tradition's historiography. Linked to this is a scholasticism that refers to the writings of the pantheon to resolve all questions and disputes rather in the manner that fundamentalist Christians refer to the Old Testament. It severely reduces the range of marxist analysis of historical events, even of the events around which the pantheon has been built. While Stalin and Trotsky are of course mutually exclusive the pantheon is otherwise common to all wings of the tradition and apart from Luxemburg (whose actual views are ignored) is restricted to the Bolshevik revolution. This freezes understanding of the dynamics of capitalist society to the point of view of men from an economically backward country, who despite extensive exiles played little or no part in the workers movement in advanced capitalism but concentrated on building an effective revolutionary organisation in a country numerically dominated by the peasantry with an antiquated and autocratic regime.

Lenin's blanket condemnation of the Second International and all its works has led to a neglect of its history and its theorists. And yet it is the organisation that grew with modern capitalism and the working class itself and in so many ways moulded the politics of the modern world. It is also the organisation that nurtured the members of the bolshevik pantheon and the one from which they never really escaped. They upended its outlook and methods but in the end remained locked in its categories and world view. The world we live in today is the world created by the practices of the Second International and its interaction with the ruling class and capitalist state.

Anton Pannekoek is one of the most important revolutionaries missing from the bolshevik tradition's pantheon (there were many others). The reason for this should be obvious. Pannekoek was the Karl Horner of Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder and a



Anton Pannekoek and the theory of the transition - Radical Chains

Pannekoek's experience of the German revolution led him to observe that the workers' own struggle needed continuously to break down regimes and forms resulting from previous struggles. This gave him a powerful analysis of opportunism and enabled him to perceive the dangers of mere representation of the working class.

Pantheon building is poor historical materialism and leads to an impoverished 'history and yet it has been the essence of the bolshevik tradition's historiography. Linked to this is a scholasticism that refers to the writings of the pantheon to resolve all questions and disputes rather in the manner that fundamentalist Christians refer to the Old Testament. It severely reduces the range of marxist analysis of historical events, even of the events around which the pantheon has been built. While Stalin and Trotsky are of course mutually exclusive the pantheon is otherwise common to all wings of the tradition and apart from Luxemburg (whose actual views are ignored) is restricted to the Bolshevik revolution. This freezes understanding of the dynamics of capitalist society to the point of view of men from an economically backward country, who despite extensive exiles played little or no part in the workers movement in advanced capitalism but concentrated on building an effective revolutionary organisation in a country numerically dominated by the peasantry with an

antiquated and autocratic regime.

Lenin's blanket condemnation of the Second International and all its works has led to a neglect of its history and its theorists. And yet it is the organisation that grew with modern capitalism and the working class itself and in so many ways moulded the politics of the modern world. It is also the organisation that nurtured the members of the bolshevik pantheon and the one from which they never really escaped. They upended its outlook and methods but in the end remained locked in its categories and world view. The world we live in today is the world created by the practices of the Second International and its interaction with the ruling class and capitalist state.

Anton Pannekoek is one of the most important revolutionaries missing from the bolshevik tradition's pantheon (there were many others). The reason for this should be obvious.

Pannekoek was the Karl Homer of Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder and a

leading theorist of western European communism and in particular for the Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD) whose separate organisation from the German Communist Party and tactics generally were the chief cause of Lenin writing against the

"infantile disorder".

There was nothing infantile about European left communism. Pannekoek and his friend and collaborator Herman Gorter were both veterans of the bitter Dutch and German workers struggles that were characteristic of the international cycles of struggle beginning at the turn of the century and culminating with the "breaking of the weakest link" in 1917. Their support for striking workers against their unions and the party hierarchy split Dutch Social-democracy in 1909. Pannekoek was one of the most innovative theorists of the Second International, overturning many accepted theoretical categories, discounting others, giving new content to still more. He was widely, internationally, published and well known across the western world. He was virtually the only leading theorist to analyse, accept and champion the changing activity of the changing European working class.

SOCIAL-DEMOCRACY

The dominating influence on the Second International was its German section, the SPD. It is difficult now to imagine the size and range of this mighty institution. It is the closest we have ever come to the working class organised as the party (even if not quite as Marx had envisaged). On the other hand its structure, activity and theory were as much shaped by Bismarck and his autocratic state socialism as by marxist theory or autonomous working class activity. Bismarck's Exceptional Law had effectively banned revolutionary activity during the state-led growth of German industrial capital while at the same time allowing electoral activity and permitting social-democrats to sit in the structurally gerrymandered parliament, thus "opening up the possibility that it could act as the sole legal opposition"

(Bricianer). Robert Michels pointed out in his sociological study of bureaucratisation and the party in the 1910s, that "the struggle carried on by socialists against the parties of the dominant classes is no longer one of principle, but simply one of competition". At the same time the SPD was growing into a state within the state in which it was possible to live from cradle to grave. It (or the unions which were part of it) organised strike- pay, unemployment benefit, sick pay, pensions, death grants, legal aid, nurseries, clinics, sports facilities and clubs, choirs, schools, women's and youth organisations, holiday facilities and much more. It published daily and weekly, national and local newspapers. And despite the growth of both openly revisionist and radical wings nobody thought to leave or split it until near the end of the first world war.

The almost schizophrenic nature of the SPD is best illustrated by its Erfurt Programme (adopted in 1891) which fell clearly and neatly into two parts. The first part was written by Kautsky and covered the final aims and "marxist" principles, the second by Bernstein and outlined immediate tactics and desired reforms. When Engels died Bernstein began a series of articles in the party paper that later became the bible of revisionism (published later in English as *Evolutionary Socialism*). Nobody paid much attention at first and it was the Englishman Belfort Bax (on whom see the last issue of *Radical Chains*) who first reacted in print and ignited the well known debate which degenerated into the "breakdown controversy". By 1906 the sociologist Weber was able to say of the SPD congress; "these gentlemen no longer frighten anyone".

The SPD had resolutely refused to recognise its illegality during the period of the Exceptional Law but behaved completely legally in every other respect. It

continued in the same vein when the law was repealed. But by the turn of the century the steady growth of the German economy was beginning to be disrupted by international competition. This put the same sort of strains on class relations as had the vicious cyclical swings of early capitalism. Unskilled

and unorganised workers were beginning to outflank the staid and defensive skilled craftsmen who formed the bulk of social-democracy, both party and trade unions (and even they were reacting to the new uncertainties). International competition led to technical innovation and the concomitant changes in the labour process and class composition were creating a more militant and innovative working class that neither the state nor social democracy could contain.

ORIGINS OF A REVOLUTIONARY THEORIST

Pannekoek had begun studying marxism in 1898 and rapidly became dissatisfied with the positivistic slant of orthodox marxian economics. In 1900 he commenced a study of the philosophical roots and discovered the work of Joseph Dietzgen, the man Marx hailed as "our philosopher". In Dietzgen's work, Pannekoek found "a clear, systematic elaboration of a theory of knowledge and an analysis of the nature of concepts and abstractions ... I was able to completely clarify my conception of the underlying relationship between Marxism and epistemology and develop it into a unified whole". His first thoughts on the party were contained in a letter to an early Dutch marxist, Frank van der Goes. He felt that the growth of class consciousness could be accelerated by an organised socialist movement, education and propaganda, channelling of activity, and waging of intense ideological struggles. Propaganda should be an "amplification and explanation" of what workers already see and perceive rather than something directed at them. The objective should be to develop a "social ideal" or

"mental picture" of the subsequent, more highly developed social system, "since everything which man does must first exist as a more or less adequate conscious ideal". Pannekoek ruled out a sharp distinction between evolution and revolution, both being part of change by human action, only the external appearance being different. The critical link between economics and revolution was not crisis but the understanding and activity of the revolutionary class brought about by material conditions (this in reference to the continuing "breakdown controversy"

started by Bernstein).

In 1901, in his first major work as a marxist, *De Filosofie van Kant en het Marxisme*, Pannekoek pointed out that Marx had left open the question of the exact content of consciousness and what its real relation to the material world was, and that this was the main reason for erroneous understandings of marxism. His 'Introduction' to the 1902 reprint of Dietzgen's *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy*, announced the key note for Pannekoek's entire development. As

Gerber paraphrases it, echoing Marx's comment on man as architect not bee; "the material world and the world of consciousness reciprocally condition each other. Without changing the structure of society one could not change the structure of consciousness. But the converse also remains true; a revolutionary upheaval in the economic and social structure is impossible without a revolution of the society's forms of consciousness. Proletarian revolution must develop simultaneously in both the economic and the 'spiritual' spheres ... Men must therefore think change before they can accomplish change"

(Gerber 1978). For Pannekoek, Dietzgen answers the question that Marx left open. He "raised philosophy to the ' position of a natural science, the same as Marx did with history". In his

'Introduction' Pannekoek traces the history of philosophy, tying it to material conditions.

Finally, Dietzgen created the basis for a dialectical and materialistic understanding and

"completes the work of Kant, just as Marx completed the work of Adam Smith". Philosophy remained important for the workers revolution, "as never since the first advent of production of commodities has there ever been such a fundamental revolution ... the new understanding gains ground step by step, waging a relentless battle against the traditional ideas to which the ruling class are clinging, this struggle is the mental companion of the social struggle"

(compare this with Pannekoek's theory for a later stage when the working class had burst the

confines of capitalist society and he placed the key theoretical struggle within the working class movement. See below).

Pannekoek was one of the few professional scientists to join the Second International (he was an astronomer/astro-physicist) and in 1904 began to clarify the relationship between science and marxism. "Thinkers can only work with the pre-existing conceptual materials of their era.

The form in which new problems are posed often creates a consciousness of the insufficiency of the traditional views and new 'truths' are then put forward as an improvement of the traditional views" (Klassenwissenschaft and Philosophie).

Technology relied on science which was part of the productive apparatus. Science represented its particular epoch; "a new ruling class is able to understand through its particular class situation the new 'truths' that serve its interests. These new 'truths' then become a powerful weapon in the struggle against the rulers of the declining order, who have neither interest in nor understanding of, the new doctrines and perceive them only as a threat ... So it is with the natural sciences that accompanied the rise of the bourgeoisie; so it is too with political economy, which is the science of the proletariat ... a certain form of science can become an object and a weapon of class struggle ... a class has an' interest only in the investigation and diffusion of those truths that directly advance its own living conditions". Historical materialism was the "class science of the proletariat", and Marx and Engels were representatives of that rising class, the "first class scientists of the new class". The proletariat "has every interest in discovering the inner laws of society and the sources of their endless torment. Because the working class is the only class which has nothing to conceal, and, therefore, can look at social phenomena in an unbiased manner, it alone is in a position to discover the truth about society".

Pannekoek interrupted his university career as an astronomer in 1906 when he was invited to teach political economy at the SPD party school in Berlin. He described the purpose of the school as follows; "We must clearly understand the nature of capitalism, not just to incite the workers to fight it but also to discover the best methods of combat. Where this understanding is lacking, tactics are governed by established traditions or superficial empiricism. When one merely takes account of the present, the immediate, appearances inevitably prove deceptive and coherence upon solid foundations is neglected." This sort of thinking upset Kautsky considerably. However, together with Rudolph Hilferding, Pannekoek was prevented from teaching at the school by the Prussian authorities on pain of deportation. Instead, he became a salaried journalist/propagandist and travelling lecturer for the party. Luxemburg took over Pannekoek's post, continuing the unsettling of Kautsky.

MASS ACTION AND THE DEPARTURE FROM ORTHODOXY

It is possible that Pannekoek was prompted to leave academe by the 1905 Russian revolution.

The reception of these events in Europe then was different to our perception of them today.

Mass strikes had taken place all over Europe, and continued to take place regularly until the outbreak of war, and all discussion of the Russian events took place in the context of a debate on "mass action" and the "mass strike". The revolution as such was not even discussed at the meeting of the International. In Germany the debate signified the hardening of a division in the party no longer between revisionists and the rest but between radicals and the rest.

Orthodoxy, verbally anti-revisionist but dedicated to organisation, discipline and "practical"

activity, ruled at the centre but locally and particularly in the industrial regions a more radical politics was gaining ground.

From 1907 to 1909 Germany suffered a general economic crisis, and in 1908 a campaign was launched for universal suffrage in Prussia. Political strikes were organised but to begin with at least, social-democratic discipline was maintained. Pannekoek was beginning to have doubts about the utility of traditional working class organisations and parliamentarism. In a factional document in the Dutch Social-democratic Party he questioned the standard strategy

of revolutionary parliamentarism for subjective effects on the basis that "Dietzgen teaches us not to doubt the truth but to have doubts about the absolute validity of a truth". "This truth is not absolute" he said of parliamentarism "it has its limitations. The labour movement has adapted itself to the strategy of parliamentarism more than is really necessary and it is impossible to attain our goals through these methods alone. A revolutionary struggle with more powerful mediums is necessary".

The general debate on "Massenaktion" and the "Massenstreik", followed by the highly disciplined but unsuccessful Prussian suffrage campaign seems to have prompted Pannekoek to reconsider the whole social-democratic project during 1909 (this was also the year of the split in the Dutch party). He published Social Democratic Non-commissioned Officers in the Bremen Burgerzeitung. In this article he went beyond the parameters of the mass strike debate to call into question the whole basis of the existing organisation because there was an

"irreconcilable opposition between revolution and authority, between subversion and order".

In the suffrage campaign, "the social-democratic non- commissioned officers do

what the Prussian non-commissioned officers cannot do, they quiet the unruly masses, accustom them to discipline, and divert them from revolution". The "corruption of the movement" was "the main hope of the bourgeoisie".

In another attack on orthodoxy in 1909, *Massenaktion and Revolution*, Pannekoek argued that the subjugation of the working class was not entirely due to economics and force but also to the "spiritual superiority of the ruling minority" which controlled schools, churches, press and "presides over all spiritual development, all science". The main cause of the weakness of the proletariat was the "spiritual dependence of the proletariat on the bourgeoisie". Invoking

"organisational spirit" as a way of breaking this dependence, Pannekoek insisted, against Kautsky's earlier accusation of mysticism, that this was "not something abstract, put forward in place of the 'real concrete organisation' of the existing organisational forms, but it is in fact something just as real and concrete as these forms. It binds individuals just as firmly together as any principles and statutes could ever do so that even if the external bond of principles and statutes were removed these individuals would no longer be loose atoms competing against each other."

Pannekoek's most important development of his theory of geist (collective consciousness) also came in 1909 in *Tactical Differences Within the Labour Movement* (see box for extract).

In this long and closely argued work he discusses the material and social origins, mediated through human thought, of revisionism, giving rise to reformism and anarchism (the new and growing anarcho-syndicalism) giving rise to purist revolutionism. Both had their roots in historically superseded middle class attitudes dating from the time of the bourgeois revolution and entered the working class movement by a variety of routes; the parliamentary deputies and trade union bureaucrats anxious for their jobs, the new proletariat forming in small manufacture as capitalism developed in country regions and the lower middle class anxious for its position in a world increasingly dominated by large capital. To adopt one of these positions to the exclusion of the other was an ideological error. But the dominant proletariat of the large factories and heavily industrialised regions were capable of seeing them both as necessary to development and as stages of that development due to their dialectical and materialist outlook.' Nonetheless one or other would always predominate in the

movement depending on the development of capitalism; in times of growth reforms would be worked for, when crisis hit revolutionism would come to the fore. Pannekoek defined reforms as positions of power for the class rather than as factors of power, the strength gained in fighting for and winning reform being more important than the reform itself. There was no linear path through reform to socialism as reforms, such as the limitation of working hours, would be of no practical use in post-capitalist society where workers ran production. Finally he noted that

because socialism as an ideology rather than as a science could be adopted by virtually anybody and given content derived from their own experience, it was gaining ground amongst the middle classes of the colonised countries as a response to the bankruptcy of liberal ideology. Lenin described all this as "deductions whose complete correctness cannot be denied" even though the geist theory on which it was based completely contradicted his own theory of consciousness as represented in, for instance, Materialism and Empirio-criticism.

ORGANIC CONNECTION

In April 1910 Pannekoek settled in Bremen. He had first visited the town in 1905 to support local radicals in a debate over education. This debate revolved around the suggestion for joint work with the Liberals (a parliamentary alliance had been proposed by the SPD deputies in 1903). The radicals defeated this suggestion, a victory that heralded their coming domination of the area. This prompted Ebert, until then leader in Bremen (later known locally as "the Stalin of Social-democracy") to leave for Berlin, where he effectively took over the leadership of the national party from August Bebel in 1912. During Pannekoek's brief period at the Berlin party school he had met one of the Bremen radicals, Heinrich Schulz, and from then on his articles were regularly published in the local party newspaper, the *Burgerzeitung*. By this time the radicals controlled not only the newspaper, but the newly formed local secretariat, party education and recruitment as well. Bremen as a town was a model of what was happening all over industrial Germany. Once a commercial town of the Hanseatic League it had been heavily industrialised in the period from 1890, the working population growing from 8,463 to 33,825 in 1907 becoming a mass workers town. By that time 66% of the workforce worked in factories of more than 200 employees and 57% of the workforce had been born elsewhere.

Factional struggle had broken out in the SPD in the context of street fighting during the renewed suffrage campaign in Prussia. Despite violent brawling and pitched battles the SPD

leadership re-exerted its control and discipline. The organisation was by all accounts impressive. On one occasion the venue for a demonstration in Berlin was changed at the last moment to evade the police and enabling 100,000 people to go on a "suffrage stroll". Kautsky published his defence of orthodoxy and the primacy of party discipline *The Road to Power* in this context, but Luxemburg was at last allowed to criticise the tactics of the party via a critique of Kautsky. Faith in the orthodox tactic of "revolutionary parliamentarism" was beginning to break down as the party apparatus and its deputies became ever more involved with "practical matters". In *Die Organisation im Kampfe* Pannekoek began to see the question of organisation in a new way due to "new experiences in the class struggle" - mass actions, exemplified by the 1905 revolution. It was no longer a problem of leadership for conscious revolution but rather of direct organisation

for revolution by the class itself; "It is not merely a question of the labouring masses simply acquiring consciousness of this task, but of them grasping it firmly and decisively. The movement will never be able to take its proper course as long as they sit around waiting for their leaders to give the word. An acceleration of our struggle is possible only when the masses themselves seize the initiative, leading and pushing their organisations forward". At this stage however, Pannekoek in common with the rest of social democracy had not seen the importance of the 1905 soviets or workers councils.

In the autumn of 1910 Pannekoek's doubts about the efficacy of social-democratic organisation for the self-liberation of the working class seemed vindicated. A lockout in the Hamburg docks prompted a walkout in Bremen despite every effort by the trade union leadership to prevent it. For several years wages and conditions had been deteriorating, the employers response to the increasing international competition, especially in shipbuilding. No

real support was forthcoming from the leadership. For three months they attempted to force a return to work and a meeting called to sell this to the membership was broken up by workers.

Despite this a return to work was enforced. This left a legacy of discontent among the workers but forged strong links between them and the Bremen radicals who had given their full support. In an attempt to defend their action the union leadership claimed that the masses were "capricious, unreliable and incapable of making important decisions". Pannekoek responded that a split between the leaders and the masses was an "inevitable and necessary"

step in revolutionary development.

It was increasingly evident to some that both war and revolution were approaching. The International had adopted a hard line resolution against war preparations from Lenin and Luxemburg in 1907 and after the Agadir incident in 1911 called on the SPD to start practical anti-war agitation. The SPD refused on the grounds that this would distract people from domestic issues in the forthcoming elections(!).

DEBATING KAUTSKY

Kautsky continued his defense of the orthodox position in a series of articles in *Die 'Neue Zeit*, *Mass Action* and in 1912 Pannekoek took over the continuing polemic with him from Luxemburg. This is the controversy cited by Lenin in *State and Revolution*. Pannekoek forced from Kautsky explicit statements of his policy of "actionless waiting". Pannekoek now saw revolutionary mass action as a continuous and expanding series of actions ranging from ordinary street demonstrations through to general strike. The rationale was not to be the attainment of the objective aims but the subjective effect, building "organisational spirit" and effecting "the whole transformation of the proletarian mentality". He also stressed the necessity of the "autonomy" of mass action rather than it being turned on and off like a tap by the party functionaries; "when we speak of mass actions and their necessity, we mean by this an extra-parliamentary political intervention of organised workers, the latter acting at the political level instead of leaving this completely to their delegates". Lenin's marginal notes here state "neverno" - not true. But Pannekoek was working from the concrete conditions of the time: "Imperialism and mass action are new phenomena ... ", and a genuinely revolutionary standpoint "the social revolution involves the gradual dissolution of all the power instruments of the ruling class, particularly the state, while simultaneously building up proletarian power to its fullness". This seems to have been his first overt thinking on the transition period, an area totally neglected by theorists of the Second International.

Pannekoek was always aware of the importance of the tactics developed by the working class in struggle and the necessity of incorporating anything new into his theory of development towards revolution. The official party seemed less and less willing or able to support the workers struggle. 1913 saw more militant activity in the docks. Again it spread from Hamburg. This time the union leadership refused to recognise the action at all. Shop stewards committees were formed (a new development) and 9,000 walked out. Without strike pay the workers were eventually forced back to work. The enforced settlement blacklisted several thousands. On this occasion the radicals attempted to mediate in conjunction with the union leadership. A consciously revolutionary group separated themselves and coalesced around Pannekoek. This would be the nucleus of the ISD (see below). In the Bremen party paper, Pannekoek again drew the lessons; "the wildcat strike with its violation of that discipline which

has hitherto been the ideal of a developed trade union shows how impossible it is to maintain perfect trade union discipline against the intense oppression exerted by capital.

Success of mass movements depends on their capacity for autonomous action ... but it is precisely these qualities, the primary condition of the struggle for freedom, that are repressed and annihilated by trade union discipline". Pannekoek was by now aware that this would lead the masses to "take different paths" and was able to face this with equanimity.

WAR AND REVOLUTION

At the outbreak of war in 1914 Pannekoek was expelled from Bremen back to Holland. The SPD Reichstag deputies, having already voted for a massive arms budget in 1913 on the basis that it would be funded from a property tax, voted for war credits. In 1915 the Dutch Tribunists including Pannekoek were instrumental in setting up the Zimmerwald conference.

Pannekoek and Henrietta Roland-Hoist were nominated to edit *Vorbote*, the conference journal.

In a 1916 article in *Vorbote*, *Der Imperialismus und die Aufgaben des Proletariats*, Pannekoek gave his explanation of the collapse of German social-democracy. It was not a question of purely crude material (physical) force but rather "a general inability to struggle, a lack of will for class struggle". A "long drawn out process of spiritual renewal" would be necessary to form a new International. Another article in *Vorbote* points out "the wartime experience gained during state control over industry and commerce has developed, in a large part of the bourgeoisie, the idea of state 'socialism' ... this state socialism can only aggravate the proletarian condition and strengthen oppression. Nationalisation of enterprises is not socialism; socialism is the force of the proletariat".

In December of 1916 the Bremen group, by then calling itself the International Socialists (ISD), broke all connections with the two wings of social-democracy that were later to become the SPD-M and the USPD (see below). Its organ, *Arbeiterpolitik* was open to outsiders such as Radek, Zinoviev and Pannekoek. Describing its political line, it stated; "one must choose the tactics of mass action unfettered by leaders, or one must keep the leadership structure, as the Spartacus

League is doing, and thereby renounce a proletarian policy".

Similarly in Holland the group around Gorter and Roland Holst split from the Tribunists. In August 1917 Pannekoek noted that in Russia "the revolutionary masses are forming a powerful organisation. As in 1905, the delegates of factories and revolutionary regiments are building in the form of workers' and soldiers councils, a peoples representation which speaks out vigorously against bourgeois government and exploiters". He noted that "some quasi -

marxists " maintained that Russia was not ripe for socialism, because of its huge peasantry and limited capitalist development, failing to recognise that "socialism can only result from a long process in which the maturity of a society is measured by the proletariat's ability to struggle for power". In October, unlike Luxemburg, he approved of the dissolution of the Russian Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks; "What we have been hoping for has just been realised".

Common knowledge of the German revolution is often limited to the "Spartacist" uprising, the failure of which saw the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. But the revolution neither started nor ended there. Despite the action of the SPD deputies in voting for war credits in 1914 the SPD did not actually split until 1917 when the anti-war opposition was expelled.

This was despite the attendance of Luxemburg and Kautsky at the Zimmerwald conference.

Lenin had been unable to persuade Luxemburg to split Social-democracy at that stage. When they were excluded Luxemburg's group, the Spartakusbund, met with Kautsky's group, also expelled, and against the wishes of both leaders, formed the United SPD (USPD). With the example of Russia before them the ISD condemned this as a return to the "old leader politics".

As the German economy and war effort began to collapse, strikes broke out in the munitions industry. The USPD reaction was to mediate and they were soon brought to a halt.

Luxemburg was of the opinion that the German proletariat was not ready for revolution. As the German regime itself collapsed Ludendorff brought the SPD into the government and sued for peace. As in Russia, the soldiers had already made this decision for themselves. So had the naval ratings, who, sensing that the admirals were planning a last ditch battle against

the Entente powers, first seized their ships and barracks and then spread across the country encouraging the workers to set up their own councils.

The SPD was still strong enough in the working class to dominate these councils while remaining in government thus straddling a very peculiar dual power situation. Under the leadership of Noske and Ebert the SPD performance was one of the coolest counter—

revolutionary of all time. Within ten days they had arranged the Stinnes-Legien agreement: the trade unions and councils were consolidated in the factories with a provision for a "co-operative commonwealth" of workers and employers (!). The National Congress of Councils consented to early elections to a National Assembly. At this point the ISD, newly renamed the International Communists (IKD), declared these councils not to be revolutionary organs and one region, East Saxony, led by Otto Ruhle, left the councils completely. Meanwhile the SPD government, biding its time, began to build the Freikorps - proto-fascist volunteer militias.

By Christmas of 1918 the USPD has fallen apart into its constituent factions and Karl Radek, newly returned from Moscow, urged unification between the Spartacists and the IKD. At the subsequent founding conference of the German Communist Party (KPD) Luxemburg and the rest of the leadership of the Spartacists found themselves isolated and defeated on the questions of hierarchical organisation, restarting parliamentary activity and only avoided losing on the question of leaving the trade unions by moving the establishment of a special commission.

Within days, in January 1919, under provocation, Berlin KPD called for massive street demonstrations. This escalated rapidly into a general uprising. In Bremen the predominantly ex-IKD KPD and the workers' councils seized power. Similar events took place all over Germany. But in Berlin the ex-Spartacist leadership failed to lead and the workers were defeated. For Luxemburg this was further proof that the German workers were not ready for revolution; her comments were later paraphrased as "the leaders were in conference, in conference, in conference. No, these masses were not ready for the seizure of power, or their initiative would have discovered others to stand at their head, and their first revolutionary act would have been to compel the leaders to stop their interminable conferences in the Polizeipraesidium" (cited by Victor Serge in Year One of the Russian Revolution). The SPD

government finally set the Freikorps to work. Revolutionary workers' councils were bloodily suppressed region by region. The Bremen workers republic held out for three weeks.

Luxemburg and Liebknecht were killed "while trying to escape". The KPD was banned. The workers were not beaten however. A strike wave starting in the Ruhr mining- region spread rapidly, with workers forming unions opposed to the old SPD-dominated trades unions.

These looked to the experience of the American IWW or the older French syndicalist tradition. Anti-parliamentarism and support for the new workers' unions split the KPD. A programme written by Pannekoek along these lines and supported by the Bremen group was discussed throughout the party. In August Levi, who had taken over from Luxemburg as leader, was beaten in a debate on Pannekoek's paper at the KPD national conference. In October, Levi organised a secret and packed conference and contrived to expel all those who would not conform to a new platform of tactical principles. This included a return to parliamentary activity and the trade unions and support for the 'institutionalised factory councils. Half the delegates were expelled and eventually 80% of the membership left. The communist left were particularly taken aback as Gorter had just made the first translation of Lenin's State and Revolution which appeared to give Lenin's imprimatur to their tactics.

The workers' unions had formed into the General Workers' Union of Germany (AAUD) in February with statutes drawn up by the Bremen group. This revolutionary federation attained a membership high of 200,000 and saw itself as the embryo of revolutionary workers'

councils. Now the extreme right took a hand. The Versailles treaty required the disbandment of the Freikorps. In response the Berlin Erhardt brigade launched a putsch which scared the SPD ministry from Berlin. The rump KPD stated that it would not lift a finger to protect the bourgeois government but the old trade union confederation immediately launched a general strike. In the Ruhr, by now a left communist stronghold, a red army formed with 80,000

workers under arms. The strike was total and brought the junta to its knees within days. The SPD government on its return to Berlin set the army on the Ruhr. The KPD declared itself a loyal opposition to the SPD government. After these experiences the left communists, who had so far refused to accept their

exclusion from the KPD, reformed as the Communist Workers Party (KAPD) and agreed to send delegates to the second congress of the Third International in Moscow. In preparation Pannekoek wrote *World Revolution and Communist Tactics* which was published in various communist journals in Europe and Russia. It remains with its 'Afterword' and Gorter's Open Letter to Comrade Lenin the definitive statement of left communist analysis of the period.

The purge of the KPD by Levi had been against the advice of Radek, representing the International, and was the first move in the international movement against the anti-parliamentary current. The KAPD, unaware of any change in Lenin's thinking, expected to receive his support against Levi. The invitation issued by the Bolsheviks to the first congress of the International had specifically excluded social-democrats of the right and centre and specifically included revolutionary elements who had not necessarily belonged to the parliamentary parties of the Second International. Many of these groups had always taken anti-parliamentary positions "on principle" and others, noting the Bolsheviks' dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, had moved to the advocacy of a workers' council system in opposition to bourgeois parliaments as Lenin had done in his April Theses. Invited to the second congress were, amongst others, the centrist the USPD, whose members included both Kautsky and Bernstein.

Lenin did disapprove of the split in German communism, apparently hoping to bring the anti-parliamentarian fraction round to his new position, and the KAPD were not excluded from the congress, the International not having, in any case, any mechanism for exclusion at that time. However, the KAPD's representative Otto Rühle, who had travelled slowly through Russia on his way to the congress, returned immediately to Germany after having been shown Lenin's theses on conditions of membership of the International. In the light of what he had seen in Russia Rühle denounced the regime as "soviet in name only". The KAPD

excluded him. Thus the KAPD was unrepresented at the congress and one of the most important documents of European communism was not discussed.

What was presented to the second Congress was Lenin's Left-wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder. It is this assessment of European left communism that sits on every socialist's bookshelf while Pannekoek is absent. Thus it is not apparent that Left-wing Communism was a contribution to a debate that was of major importance in the world communist movement, for while Lenin admits that anti-parliamentarism was geographically widespread he does not make clear the size

of the forces ranged against what was after all a change of policy nor does he admit the intellectual rigour of their arguments.

Geist and Communist Tactics It should be stressed that WR&CT was not an anti-Lenin or anti-Bolshevik text but rather theoretical support for an appeal to Lenin and the International to intercede against opportunism in the German and international communist movement. It does this by presenting a theory of transition to a 'communist society. Although Pannekoek was later fiercely to attack both Lenin's philosophy and the Bolshevik's running of the

"soviet" state, his target here is opportunism in western Europe and especially in Germany

and Britain, because of its effects not only on the working class of Europe but also on Russia and the Bolsheviks themselves via the agency of the International.

While WR&CT is more than a council communist manifesto, workers' councils, soviets, were for Pannekoek the major breakthrough of the current phase of development towards communism. In a slightly earlier article in the journal of the International's Vienna Centre, *Kommunismus*, he described the workers' councils as: "the organ of the dictatorship of the proletariat in which the bourgeoisie cannot participate. The bourgeoisie will not be excluded in any artificial way from government, for instance, by losing its right to vote; quite simply, it will be barred from this organisation, which is based not on people but on labour ... All these councils remain in close, permanent contact with the masses, their membership constantly renewed and replaced. The formation of a new bureaucracy is thus prevented, and a monopoly in administrative skills is broken." (*Bolshevismus und Demokratie* 1919, Bricianer 1978 pp150-151)

Pannekoek was not much given to quoting chapter and verse from Marx, leaving that to his pedantically orthodox opponents such as Kautsky, although he paraphrased Marx without attribution frequently. He prefaced WR&CT, however, with an epigram from Marx's Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right (the same source as the cover quotation of *Radical Chains*); "Theory itself becomes a material force once it takes hold on the masses ... once it becomes radical." Thereafter Pannekoek's first two sentences reveal the foundation of his marxism; "The transformation of capitalism into communism is brought about by two forces, one material and the other mental, the latter having its origins in the former. The material development of the economy

generates consciousness, and this activates the will to revolution." "Marxist science" which arises from "the general tendencies of capitalist development" provides the revolutionary movement with intellectual unity. On the one side this theory is gradually penetrating the working masses while on the other side their own experience begins to convince them that capitalism is no longer viable. But, "world war and rapid economic collapse now makes revolution objectively necessary before the masses have grasped communism intellectually; and this contradiction is at the root of the contradictions, hesitations and setbacks which make the revolution a long and painful process". The core of Pannekoek's argument is here; a communist revolution requires not only crude material objective circumstances but also an aware, consciously communist proletariat. Communist society requires communist individuals, united through conscious social organisation. For Pannekoek communist consciousness and organisation were inextricably and dialectically linked.

Pannekoek believed that "as far as western Europe is concerned, the development of revolution is mainly determined by two forces; the collapse of the capitalist economy and the example of Soviet Russia". In Russia, Proletarian organisation (meaning the councils and what Pannekoek took to be the council state). had been relatively easy to attain. And so therefore had the revolution. Capitalism was relatively recent, the ruling classes were divided and the bourgeoisie proper were weak (plus the peasant revolution paralleled the proletarian revolution). In western Europe, on the other hand, capitalism was long-established, the ruling class was united (by and against the working class) and the bourgeoisie very strong. In addition the peasantry, by virtue of its economic position, was both small and anti-working class.

The long history of capitalism in western Europe explained the geist of the masses which in turn explained the course of events of the German revolution. "Because the proletarian masses were still completely governed by a bourgeois mentality, they restored the hegemony of the bourgeoisie with their own hands after it had collapsed". Economic collapse had in fact happened; not the indefinitely future, much theorised collapse of the "breakdown"

controversy, but an actual complete social breakdown. It was possible to starve in Germany

in 1920. "Economic collapse is the most powerful spur to revolution". But given the geist of the working masses, "the revolution in western Europe will be a

slow, arduous process".

Unlike Russia "power will not fall into the hands of the unprepared masses as a result of politico-economic collapse; the proletariat will have to fight hard for it, and will thus have attained a higher degree of maturity when it is won".

The example of Soviet Russia was important, the soviet state existed as a model; "the existence of a state in which working people are the rulers, where they have abolished capitalism and are engaged in building communism, could not but make a great impression upon the proletariat of the whole world" but this was not enough on its own, "the human mind is most strongly influenced by the effects of its own environment".

The environment of the German proletariat was one where capital was attempting to re-impose its rule after social collapse and the proletariat was engaged in a struggle against impoverishment. This was seen by Pannekoek as turning into a conscious revolutionary struggle but even that in itself did not automatically imply a conviction of communism.

Pannekoek did not believe that the bourgeoisie were capable of the social reconstruction that was necessary after the war. The bourgeoisie "or rather each individual bourgeois acted in a characteristically bourgeois manner; each of them thought only of making as much profit as possible" meanwhile, and as a consequence, there is "an increase in the frequency of strikes and a strong aversion to work among the proletariat". The bourgeoisie may have, individually, been incapable of reconstruction, but Pannekoek believed that they had learned more from the Russia revolution than the workers had; the bourgeoisie "decked itself out in red ... (and) immediately began to rebuild the organs of its power", giving the only party that had any chance of disciplining the working class, the SPD, the chance to do so in the name of the bourgeois state. In effect, the reformist party had to defeat the revolutionary working class in order to bring about reform for the (supposed) benefit of that class.

But the bourgeoisie was only forced to rely on the SPD because of the strength of the working class. The revolution was not over yet. It evidently was going to be a long process.

Under the circumstances the SPD could only rule with the consent of the working class. It was in effect a government of workers' bureaucracy. Pannekoek

foresaw a chaotic series of these workers bureaucracies, not necessarily parliamentary, as the class learnt that it itself had to take over the running of the economy. "Each new phase of the revolution brings a new layer of as yet unused leaders to the surface as the representatives of particular forms of Organisation, and the overthrow of each of these in turn represents a higher stage in the proletariat's self-emancipation". It would take time; "it will take decades to overcome the infectious, paralysing influence of the bourgeois culture upon the proletariat in the old capitalist countries" because "revolution requires social reconstruction to be undertaken, difficult decisions to be made, the whole proletariat involved in creative action ... this is difficult and laborious, thus, so long as the working class thinks it sees an easier way out through others acting on its behalf ... the old habits of thought will make it hesitate and remain passive". Thus both the objective circumstances and subjective perceptions affect progress towards communism; "a revolution simultaneously involves a profound upheaval in the masses thinking, it creates the conditions for this, and is itself conditioned by it".

A revolution in the Geist of the working class was obviously necessary. Where else did the power of the bourgeoisie lie? It could not reside in their numbers, the proletariat was far more numerous. Their control of the "whole of economic life" was important but fading (under the influence of even the existing councils and working class resistance). Their "control of the state, with all its means of coercion" was important but it had collapsed in 1918 and the workers had been unable to prevent its re-imposition. The workers were imbued with

bourgeois ideology, they believed that the bourgeois interest constituted the general interest.

This ideology was inculcated by the intelligentsia. The press, schools and the church all played their part; "priests, teachers, literati, journalists, artists, politicians - form a numerous class, the function of which is to foster, develop and propagate bourgeois culture ... the hegemony of capital is rooted in this group's intellectual leadership of the masses". These groups constantly reinforce bourgeois culture which "exists in the proletariat primarily as a traditional cast of thought". Tradition in itself was a problem, even the workers' own, inextricably linked with bourgeois society as it was; "the proletariat has in every period had to build up methods, forms and aids to struggle corresponding to the contemporary stage of capitalist development ... they have subsequently become fetters upon development which had to be broken", "every stage of the

development of the class struggle must overcome the tradition of the previous stages".

With temporary victory turned to temporary defeat in the German revolution, Pannekoek could see that it was the workers' movement's own traditions that now embodied "the hegemony of bourgeois conceptions". The problems in part derived from the belief in leaders, and especially parliamentary leaders. During the long development of the working class these beliefs united the class; "social democracy originally sought to realise this class unity" but

"the firm solidarity and discipline which developed in the often acute class struggle of half a century did not bury capitalism, for it represented the power of leadership and organisation over the masses". This power took the concrete form of "reverence for abstract slogans like

'democracy' ... old habits of thought and programme points, such as the realisation of socialism through parliamentary leaders and a socialist government ... the lack of proletarian self-confidence ... lack of faith in their own power; but above all in their trust in the party, in the organisation and in the leaders who for decades had incarnated their struggles, their revolutionary goals, their idealism". The leaders and the parties, "these enormous machines painstakingly created by the masses themselves ... now crushed all the revolutionary tendencies once more flaring up in the masses".

Dependency on the party was the problem. Not this party or that, but all parties; "a revolution can no more be made by a big party or a coalition of parties than by a small radical party. It breaks out spontaneously among the masses; action instigated by a party can sometimes trigger it off (a rare occurrence), but the determining forces lie elsewhere, in the psychological forces deep in the unconscious of the masses and in the great events of world politics". "No 'resolute minority' can resolve the problems which can only be resolved by the action of the class as a whole". This was a direct criticism of the KPD and the International's representative in Germany, Radek, at that time looking for a rapprochement with the centrist mass party the USPD.

OPPORTUNISM AGAIN

Precisely because there was a long process to go through in the west European revolution there was time for this sort of tactical difference to appear. Rapid revolutionary development clarified issues but when a period of relative stagnation set in, "when the masses let anything pass without protest and revolutionary slogans no longer seem to catch the imagination" and especially when the communist party itself remains weak, different perspectives emerge.

Pannekoek identifies two main tendencies; "one current seeks to revolutionise and clarify peoples minds by word and deed, and to this end tries to pose the new principles in the sharpest possible contrast to the old, received conceptions. The other current attempts to draw the masses still on the sidelines into practical activity, and therefore emphasises points of agreement rather than points of difference in an attempt to avoid as far as is possible anything that might deter them. The first strives for a clear, sharp separation among the masses, the second for unity; the first current may be termed the radical tendency, the second the

opportunist one". Opportunism did not mean mere quietism however; "on the contrary, lack of clear, principled tactics is too often concealed in rabidly strident language; and indeed, in revolutionary situations, it is characteristic of opportunism to suddenly set all its hopes on the great revolutionary deed".

The real problem with opportunism was its concentration on immediate success, defined in an unprincipled way, at the expense of lasting achievement and the final victory. Pannekoek describes opportunist tactics in terms reminiscent of the behaviour of the SPD before the outbreak of the war; it sought alliances with other "progressive" groups, hoping to split the ruling class. But this merely confused the working class and any power gained was illusory as the bourgeoisie was "inwardly united" against the working class.

The reason for opportunism in the period of the Second International was historically explicable. But it was now making an appearance in the Third, Communist, International.

With the expulsion of the anti-parliamentarian and anti-trade union left from the KPD, the KPD had approached, at the prompting of Radek and Lenin, the

USPD. At the same time, under the stress of the crisis, radical workers still tied to the USPD were pushing it towards the Third International. The gap that had opened up between conscious communist organisations and the rest was closing again. The specifically communist nature of the International movement was being diluted, even abandoned, for the sake of membership numbers. Where many communists "tend to see only the increased strength accruing", Pannekoek saw "an increase in vulnerability". Firmness of principle was vital, for despite the Russian example, revolution was "an extremely complex and arduous process". New, radical, practice was essential but "opportunism in the Third International relies as far as possible upon the forms of struggle taken over from the Second International". It had to be combatted, "the revolution thus develops through the process of internal struggle. It is within the proletariat itself that the resistances develop which must be overcome; and in overcoming them, the proletariat overcomes its own limitations and matures towards communism."

For Pannekoek the party had a very specific role based on the fact that "the contradiction between the rapid economic collapse of capitalism and the immaturity of spirit represented by the power of bourgeois tradition over the proletariat - a contradiction which has not come about by accident, in that the proletariat cannot achieve the maturity of spirit required for hegemony and freedom within a flourishing capitalism - can only be resolved by the process of revolutionary development, in which spontaneous uprisings and seizures of power alternate with setbacks". Given that "a transition period of social and political chaos becomes inevitable", "it cannot be the task of the Communist Party to act the schoolmaster in this upheaval and make vain attempts to truss it in a strait-jacket of traditional forms; its task is to support the forces of the proletarian movement everywhere, to connect the spontaneous actions together, to give them a broad idea of how they are related to one another, and therefore prepare the unification of the disparate actions and thus put itself at the head of the movement as a whole". Although it was possible that the communist party would be forced to take power prematurely and then lose it again (as in Bremen), "the reconstruction of the economy, inordinately difficult as it will be, is not the main problem for the Communist party. When the proletarian masses develop their intellectual and moral potential to the full,

'they will resolve it themselves. The prime duty of the Communist Party is to arouse and foster this potential'. It had also to "conduct a strong and principled fight" against any transitional form, any government of socialist party leaders or workers' bureaucracy. "The function of a revolutionary party lies in propagating

clear understanding in advance, so that throughout the masses there will be elements who know what must be done and who are capable of judging the situation for, themselves".

The party comes to lead the struggle because its propaganda, slogans, programme and directives are recognised by the masses as expressing their own aims. Pannekoek recognised that propaganda could be a thankless task during a period of mass inactivity but clarity of principle then would count powerfully in the inevitable periods of struggle. Opportunism watered down principles at such times. It makes- no attempt to revolutionise ideas which is the prerequisite for gaining power. "If the most important element of the revolution consists in the masses taking their own affairs the management of society and production in hand themselves, then any form of organisation which does not permit control And direction by the masses themselves is counter-revolutionary and harmful". There is no place for ideas of taking over existing, traditional, organisations or even of working within them, "it was recently argued in Germany that communists must go into parliament to convince the workers that parliamentary struggle is useless - but you don't take a wrong turning to show other people that it is wrong, you go the right way from the outset!" Exclusion of the Communists The KAPD was formally excluded from the Third International in September 1921 having already suffered its first serious split. By the time Hitler came to power it barely existed. Pannekoek returned to Holland to take up his astronomical career. He was still important enough to head the Nazis' death list when they invaded. He survived the war in hiding, using his time to write his last lengthy work, Workers' Councils.

Paul Levi, having himself split the KPD, opposed the splitting of the Italian Socialist Party by the International in January 1921 and resigned from the KPD Central Committee. The International pushed the KPD into the "March Action" in 1921. It was a shambles, unsupported by the workers and all but destroying the party. Levi was expelled, complaining that the Russians did not understand European conditions. The leadership that had replaced him, Brandler and Thalheimer, was purged after the next debacle, the German "October" of 1923, similarly disorganised by the International (now completely dominated by the Bolsheviks). Fischer and Maslow, who took over, witch-hunted the left from the party but were in their turn purged for the "western European" deviation at the prompting of Zinoviev in late 1925.

The Bolshevik-dominated International conformed completely to Pannekoek's

characterisation of opportunism: lack of clear principled tactics, rabidly strident language, setting all its hopes on the "great revolutionary deed". This was not Stalin's Comintern, it was the International of the old Bolsheviks, of Lenin and Trotsky. The charitable might detect a hint of embarrassment in Lenin's attack on his old comrades. Nobody could accuse Trotsky of any such emotion after reading the despicable personal attack, riddled with inaccuracies and deliberate misrepresentation, that he made on Gorter at the Executive Committee of the International in November 1920.

COMMUNIST REVOLUTION - A HISTORICAL PROCESS AND PROJECT

History is difficult stuff. The validity of theory in history is even more difficult to judge. As Pannekoek (after Dietzgen) might have said, the truth of all theory is historically contingent.

The temptation is to ask "what if?". What if Lenin had supported the KAPD? Even without the KAPD as a combat organisation the German bourgeoisie never really gained control of German society on their own terms until 1945. What if the 1921 or 1923 KPD uprisings had not been tiny, absurd acts of opportunism but had been properly prepared for, using Pannekoek's insights, KAPD methods? Alas, the only reality is the one that happened. Farce turned to tragedy. The Second International had been unable to prevent the First World War.

The Third International was unable to prevent the Second or foment the European revolution.

Those who will not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.

By discounting the marxian economics of his time, Pannekoek developed political economy, concentrating on the formation, activity and changes of classes through the 'historical

process. It has been said that it is not Dietzgen himself who is important but what Pannekoek (and the other Dutch marxists) made of him. His understanding of Dietzgen put *geist* at the centre of Pannekoek's analysis. It is a concept missing from the Bolshevik tradition but without it the working class remain the object not the subject of theory and history. Equipped as he was with the philosophically and scientifically crude "reflection theory" of consciousness, Lenin believed that it was only necessary to change crude material

circumstances, the economy, to have this passively reflected by men and women, bringing about communism. In this he was at one with Kautsky (insofar as Kautsky ever thought about the matter at all). Lenin's great breakthrough and break with Kautsky remained on a political level. He realised the necessity of the complete overthrow of the state and seized the time when the opportunity presented itself. In that he was a great revolutionary. But he wished to build "socialism" with consciousness as it then existed (as he said in *State and Revolution*) and retained a simplistic undialectical and linear conception of the transition period, losing sight of communism in the process.

Pannekoek denied any such possibility in western Europe and there are hints in *WR&CT*

where he discusses the bureaucratisation of the new system that he had doubts about the situation even in Russia though the bourgeois influence on the geist of the proletariat there had been slight (but not slight on the party leadership). Certainly in Europe, existing consciousness could not build communism; "the proletariat cannot achieve the maturity of spirit for hegemony and freedom within a flourishing capitalism". From 1917 Pannekoek abandoned "socialism" and identified it as a barrier to be overcome on the road to communism. Between capitalism and communism lies a transition period identified by the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the immediate aftermath of bourgeois domination with the geist formed under that domination, that dictatorship will be embodied in a variety of forms, in a person, clique, a committee, a party, a government. That is not communism (although it may be socialism) although it may be a necessary stage. Pannekoek's theory of consciousness was far more complex than Lenin's, richer-and thus so was his theory of the transition. He understood that men and women learn through experience and experience takes time even when aided by the propagation of communist theory. Each person's and the class's working theory of society, conscious or not will only be revolutionised by being found wanting, by not meeting the needs of objective circumstances. The transition covers the period when the class learns that while it may not make history in conditions of its own choosing it does make history and by consciously making history it can achieve communism. The emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself.

Pannekoek made many important theoretical advances. The bureaucratisation of the bolshevised International and of the Bolsheviks themselves and the dominance of their tradition meant that those advances were lost. He realised

that imperialism-while not an objective necessity for capital but a result of choices made by human representatives of capital because it was profitable - brought about an objective internationalisation of the working class, just as mass activity, general strike and civil war did, in opposition to the national politics of parliaments. The crisis that resulted from imperialism, a result of a social not an automatic, economic breakdown, brought about the objective necessity for autonomous proletarian activity, so that "the proletariat ceases to be a member of capitalist society and becomes its destroyer". He realised that once the working class had broken free the bourgeoisie could never rule again in the old way, "nor can the proletariat again be brought into a state of dependence". He realised that the transition began at that point and would not be a linear process; "a simple schema of conquering political power, introducing the council system and then abolishing private commerce, even though this represents the broad outline of development", for this "would only be possible if one could undertake

reconstruction in some sort of void". He was no utopian (as some council communists became) for while he believed that some general sort of mental picture of the new society was necessary he was also aware that consciousness did not float in the heads of workers unattached to objective reality, that organisation was necessary and because organisation was based on previous reality and tradition, then the "new form of organisation can itself only be set up in the process of revolution, by workers making a revolutionary intervention".

To repeat the point: in Pannekoek's dialectical theory of the transition no regime between capitalism and communism is, in itself, progressive. Progress is made by the class overthrowing each bureaucratic regime in succession as it fails to reflect the development of the class and this is not going to be a smooth process. Development is by a series of radical ruptures. Near the end of WR&CT Pannekoek again breaks with his usual practice and quotes Marx (from the Eighteenth Brumaire): "Proletarian revolutions constantly criticise themselves, continually interrupt themselves in the course of their own development, come back to the seemingly complete in order to start it all over again, treat the inadequacies of their own first attempts with cruelly radical contempt, seem only to throw their adversaries down to enable them to draw new strength from the earth and rise up again to face them all the more gigantic."

B.Shepherd

I am immensely indebted, almost to the point of plagiarism at times, to messrs

Bricianer, Smart, and Gerber and their works listed below. They are not however responsible for precise points of the analysis.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Sources for Pannekoek and Gorter:

Pannekoek and the Workers' Councils, Serge Bricianer, tr. Malachy Carroll (Telos Press, Saint Louis, 1978) (contains an article by John Gerber on Pannekoek's philosophy and large chunks of Pannekoek's writings with commentary)

The Positive Outcome of Philosophy, Josef Dietzgen (Charles H. Kerr, Chicago 1928) (contains Dietzgen's Nature of Human Brainwork and Pannekoek's Introduction) Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism, D. A. Smart (Pluto Press, London 1978) (contains World Revolution and Communist Tactics and an important historical Introduction) John Gerber Journal of Contemporary History v23 '88

Open Letter to Corrivide Lenin: An Answer to Lenin's Pamphlet_ "Left-wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder, Herman Garter (Wildcat, London 1989)

Other writing by Pannekoek available in English:

"The Theory of the Collapse of Capitalism "(1934), (Capital and Class 1, Spring 1977)

"On Organisation" (1938) ;Capital and Class 9, Autumn 1979) Lenin as Philosopher

Workers Councils

see also:

"Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origins of the Workers' Council Movement", Sergio Bologna (Telos 13, Fall 1972)

The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923 Vol 3, E. H. Carr (Penguin 1966) The Forming of the Communist International, James W. Hulse (Stanford 1964) Dialectic of Defeat: Contours of Western Marxism, Russell Jacoby (Cambridge U.P.

APPENDIX

JOSEPH DIETZGEN (1828-1886) was a tanner and self-taught philosopher from Germany.

He participated in the events of 1848 and was forced to flee to the United States. Thereafter he recrossed the Atlantic several times and travelled widely in America, often on foot. He was active in the workers' movement on both sides of the Atlantic. He also worked in Russia for several years. Toward the end of his life he took over the editorship of several anarchist newspapers in Chicago in the aftermath of the Haymarket demonstration and the mass arrests that followed. He corresponded with Marx, who personally introduced him at a meeting of the International and visited him during a journey to Germany. His first and best book is *The Nature of Human Brainwork* which presents an inductive theory of knowledge and bypassed Hume's dilemma by simply accepting that all theories are relative and contingent. As thoughts and theories derived from brainwork, a labour process, they were as material as physical objects. Pannekoek described Dietzgen's theory of knowledge as; "primarily materialistic ... it starts from concrete, materialist being. Not that it regards mere physical matter as its basis; it is rather opposed to crude bourgeois materialism, and matter to it means everything that exists and furnishes material for thought, including thoughts and imaginations. Its foundation is the unity of all concrete being". Engels credited Dietzgen with the independent discovery of dialectical materialism but in Dietzgen's dialectics there were no absolute opposites or contradictions but a mental separation of the particular from the general, giving rise to contradictory categories, together with generalisation from the particular. Like Pannekoek, Dietzgen has been considerably better known worldwide than he is now. In Britain Dietzgen's works provided the background to the working class educationalists such as Fred Casey (see *Capital and Class* 7) and Noah Ablest (see the last issue of *Radical Chains*) working in the Plebs League and Labour College movement.

FROM: PANNEKOEK, TACTICAL DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE LABOUR

MOVEMENT

(1909, reprinted in Bricianer)

The proletariat have their own dialectical idea of necessary social development, whose stages can be grasped only in terms of antagonistic notions - for example, revolution and evolution, theory and practice, final objective and movement. Especially proletarian is the idea that all apparently opposed situations are simply movements in a major process of development. The proletariat does not reason along logical either/or lines - for example, either revolution or evolution - but sees in two such elements simply two aspects of the same development ... The middle class, non-dialectical way of thinking takes account only of the accidental, which for the most part is merely a passing phenomenon, and so it swings from one extreme to the other. It notices contradictions only in the form of "on the one hand ... on the other hand," but without seeing in them the driving force of development; in its view, a development is to be seen as a slow evolution which, while no doubt ends by effecting some change, leaves the essential quality intact.

This first opposition is closely connected with the second. While the proletarian outlook is materialist, the middle class outlook is ideological; dialectic and materialism go hand in hand, as do ideology and non-dialectic. For the proletariat, it is material forces that govern the world, forces outside the scope of the individual; for the middle class, development depend on the creative force of the human mind. The material reality is dialectical; that is, it can be truly grasped only as a unit made up of opposed ideas. By contrast, in the notions and ideas which, according to the middle class way of thinking, constitute the driving force of development, the terms of the contradiction mutually exclude one another as notions; for example, evolution and revolution, liberty and organisation. We are concerned in the middle class context with abstract ideas, with incompatible essences, no account being taken of the underlying material reality; either revolution or evolution, without the possibility of a third term. So, when revolution is regarded as the only true principle, minor reforms are

automatically declared anathema; or, vice versa, the minor reforms are alone considered valid. Socialism is the ideology of the modern proletariat. Ideology signifies a system of ideas, conceptions and plans, a spiritual expression of the

conditions of material life and of class interests. But these spiritual expressions do not exactly correspond to the reality of their context. The ideas and conceptions are expressed in an abstract manner in which the concrete reality whence the ideology has been derived does not always appear, or appears with a variety of different aspects. So the idea of freedom, as a political watchword, derives from middle class interest in free enterprise and free competition; but each class that uses it gives the idea a meaning of its own...

... Every class can shape its ideas only on the elements of reality it knows directly; it does not understand, and therefore ignores, whatever is foreign to its own experience. So it is that it projects upon the ideas and ideals it has adopted experiences and desires associated with its particular situation...

... The ideas and conceptions of the proletariat have as their basis a science of society that enables them to foresee the consequences of their actions and the reactions of the other classes. Up to the present, ideologies, lacking awareness of concrete reality, were simply an extravagant reflection of the economic situation, whereas socialism constitutes a clear scientific theory; Ideology and science are both abstract, general expressions of concrete reality; but the basic difference between them is that an ideology constitutes an unconscious generalisation, one in which awareness of the corresponding concrete reality is lost, whereas science is a conscious generalisation whose conclusions make it possible to discern precisely the concrete reality from which they have been drawn. Hence, therefore, ideology is above all a matter of sentiment, while science is a matter of intellection.

... The role of theory in the workers' movement is to deflect the will from direct, instinctive, powerful impulses, and to render it responsive to conscious and rational knowledge.

Theoretical knowledge enables the worker to escape from the influence of immediate and limited interests, to the great benefit of the general class interest of the proletariat; it enables him to bring his activity into line with the long-term interest of socialism.... It is the implementation of theory, the scientific basis of socialism, that will contribute most effectively to both securing for the movement a tranquil and sure course, and to the transformation of unconscious instinct into conscious human action.

(From *Radical Chains* no 2)